



From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

Persecuted

As incredible as it may seem, there are Christians among us who would deny that Christians in our modern age are being persecuted. They should open their eyes to what is going on all around them.

Not that persecution for Christ's sake is to be unexpected. Jesus Himself said, "If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you." (John 15:18-19 HCSB)

American sociologists David Williamson and George Yancey report in their book — So Many Christians, So Few Lions: Is There Christianophobia in the United States? — that a small but elite group of influential Americans harbor distinct signs of anti-Christian hostility.

A wide-ranging interview with Yancey, professor of sociology at the University of North Texas in Denton, was published January 29 on The Christian Post web site. The interview was conducted by Post reporter Napp Nazworth.

The general image they have of Christians is that they are a backward, non-critical thinking, child-like people who do not like science and want to interfere with the lives of everyone else," Yancey said. "But even worse, they see ordinary Christians as having been manipulated by evil Christian leaders and will vote in whatever way those leaders want. They believe that those leaders are trying to set up a theocracy to force everybody to accept their Christian beliefs.

"Christians are often seen as the great evil force that blocks our society from achieving this progressive paradise.

"By documenting just how hateful some of the attitudes are toward Christians, and who tends to have such hateful attitudes, I hope to bring Christianophobia into the light so that we, as a society, can discuss this social problem and

how we might address bigotry in all of its myriad forms."

By no means is the persecution isolated to the United States. In fact, we have it quite easy compared to the rest of the world. Boko Haram, the Islamic extremist group based primarily in Nigeria, recently conducted a military offensive in that country that slaughtered over 2,000 people. Care to guess who most of the victims were?

Boko Haram now has its sights set on the northeast Nigerian city of Maiduguri, where over 200,000 Christian men, women, and children will be targeted for extermination. NBC News reported that sacking the city, which has two million total residents, will also enable Boko Haram to launch attacks into Cameroon, Niger, and Chad — all part of an ancient caliphate.

Meanwhile in the Middle East, Islamic extremist group ISIS recently rounded up and executed 21 Coptic Christian men. (Copts are believers whose ancestors lived in Egypt before that country was overrun by Muslim belligerents in the tenth century A.D.) Other atrocities committed by ISIS are legion, including the rapes and beheadings of children.

On January 8, international Christian human rights group Open Doors released its 2015 World Watch List that details the worst nations for religious persecution. "Approximately 100 million Christians are persecuted worldwide, making them one of the most persecuted religious groups in the world," Open Doors reported. "Islamic extremism is the main source of persecution in 40 of the 50 countries on the 2015 World Watch List."

We'd better wake up. They haven't come for us — yet — but their goal is to do to us what they are doing to other Christians around the world. If not to us in this generation, to our children and grandchildren in their generations.

It's time to unleash our greatest weapon. So are you prayed up?

OK to pray, 'Help!'

I'm rarely one to nap. Normally my brain doesn't shut off long enough for me to sleep amidst a day. When the sun is shining, the pressure of productivity and task completion are all too real. I can't live with time that feels wasted, so naps have just never been for me.

On this particular day, a nap quickly became a necessity. The exhaustion coupled with the cold weather persuaded me with little resistance. As I laid there, I began talking to Jesus. My confessions were real, my frustrations were real, and my tears were real.

I prayed for something I've prayed for every day for a year and seven months. It's a bold prayer, a specific prayer, and an impossible prayer. One that only Jesus can answer.

As I prayed, I realized in great humility that I didn't believe for a second that God would answer it. Could He hear me? Yes, absolutely. Was He able to act on my request? Without a doubt. I didn't believe He would. Honestly, I still don't.

I confessed my unbelief in that moment, but that didn't ease it. I was still overcome and paralyzed by my doubt as quickly as my confession came, so did His grace. He told me in that moment that it was OK. That there was a shred of faith in me, evidenced in the prayer itself. I didn't see it, I didn't recognize it, but why would I ask if there wasn't something in me that knew that in Him was hope? Maybe that's why the man in Mark 9 was able to say both, "I believe!" and "Help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

Deep down, I'm afraid to hope, to keep hoping. Afraid to really give this dream to Jesus. Afraid that even He, the Creator and lover of my soul, will break me, leave me shattered in unfulfilled dreams, wasted prayers and withered faith. So I try to turn it off, resist hope, and avoid disappointment.

It's safer. It's cleaner. As I've found, it's also dead. I become numb to feeling anything at all and, yes, I avoid disappointment but I also avoid the deepest of joys. There's no life in that and Jesus died for us to live and live abundantly (John 10:10).



Guest opinion
with Erica Wright

Peter says that we, as believers, are born into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus (1 Peter 1:3). Just as Jesus is alive, so is our hope. No matter what, we will live and we will have the love and affection of Jesus, which is in fact what our souls are really craving.

The dreams I have are His to hold. This specific one I believe He put within me, otherwise I would have willed it out of me a long time ago, believe me.

I think it's OK to have faith so small sometimes you can't find it, faith that's as small as a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20). It's there, sweet follower of Jesus, and He is pleased by it because the weakness of our humanity is the showcase of His greatness and His strength.

Let that inkling lead you to the cross, to hope in the person of Jesus no matter the shattered dreams that seem to be scattered at your feet. Choose to believe that He has the best dream of all, far greater than what you could work out for yourself because He cares deeply for you (1 Peter 5:7).

If you can't find the faith, pray. If all you can pray is "Help!" then just start there. Pray and then pray some more. He is painting a beautiful picture, not just for you, but of you. He will turn the smallest of faiths into the greatest of stories.

Wright serves on staff at 121 Community Church in Grapevine, Texas, and blogs at RestingInPursuit.com. Reprinted from Southwestern's Biblical Woman website, biblicalwoman.com.

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Length of Genesis 'days' still sparks lively debate

NASHVILLE (BP) — An article by a popular evangelical blogger arguing that the six "days" of creation in Genesis were not literal 24-hour periods has prompted discussion among Christians about the earth's age and whether orthodoxy necessarily entails believing in a young earth.

Justin Taylor, senior vice president and publisher for books at Crossway in Wheaton, Ill., posted a blog article Jan. 28 arguing that there are "biblical reasons to doubt the creation days were 24-hour periods." The article, which was shared on Facebook 15,000 times during its first two weeks online, also noted famous people from church history who did not believe Genesis describes six 24-hour days.

"I want to suggest there are some good, textual reasons — in the creation account itself — for questioning the exegesis that insists on the days as strict 24 hour periods," wrote Taylor, a Ph.D. student at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. "Am I as certain of this as I am of the resurrection of Christ? Definitely not. But in some segments of the church, I fear that we've built an exegetical 'fence around the Torah,' fearful that if we question any aspect of young-earth dogmatics we have opened the gate to liberalism."

"Defenders of inerrancy," as Taylor put it, who did not believe in six 24-hour periods, like Augustine, J. Gresham Machen, and Carl F.H. Henry, "show that this is not the case," Taylor wrote. "And a passion for sola Scriptura provides us with the humility and willingness to go back to the text again to see if these things are so."

Baptist Faith & Message

Southern Baptist seminary professors, though divided on whether Taylor's conclusion is correct, agreed that old-earth creationism falls within the bounds of the Baptist Faith and Message (BFM). However, they distinguished old-earth creationism from theistic evolution.

Old-earth creationism contends that God brought the world into existence from nothing by His direct action, and not by evolution. Old-earth creationists say the earth is billions rather than thousands of years old and that the "days" of Genesis 1 were not 24-hour periods.

Theistic evolutionists claim God used evolution to create, directing the process but not simply speaking things into existence.

Young-earth creationists believe God created the world from nothing between 6,000 and 50,000 years ago, in six literal days.

Jason Duesing, provost at Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., told Baptist Press he disagrees with Taylor's blog post but believes it "is helpful because it reframes a well-worn debate topic back to what the text actually says."

"As the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 does not specifically address the age of the earth, much like the finer points of eschatology it is a secondary matter to determine what SBC seminary professors believe about the issue.

"I do not mean to imply it is not important for under the BFM, SBC faculty must affirm the creation and existence of a literal Adam and Eve and see no room for the affirmation of theistic evolution," Duesing said in written comments.

Old Earth vs. Young Earth debate

"In the end, I see this as an intramural discussion among creationists and hope that such only serves to bind us closer together in refuting that which is clearly contrary to Scripture, the theory of evolution."

Jason Duesing

provost at Midwestern Seminary



TAYLOR



DUESING



HAM



KEATHLEY



HAMILTON



JAMES

"Personally, I remain convinced that the young-earth view best accounts for the plain reading of the Bible, and while I have not polled the faculty at Midwestern on this topic, I suspect the majority of the faculty would as well. For those who hold to an old-earth view, I support the legitimacy of their doing so and enjoy the sharpening that comes from healthy dialogue, even as their conclusions and implications do cause me some good natured head-scratching."

"In the end, I see this as an intramural discussion among creationists and hope that such only serves to bind us closer together in refuting that which is clearly contrary to Scripture, the theory of evolution," Duesing said.

The Baptist Faith and Message refers to God as the "Creator" and explains, "Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation."

Old earth

Taylor presented five biblical considerations that lead him to believe the "days" of Genesis 1 were longer than 24 hours. Among Taylor's arguments:

■ **The seventh 'day' is not 24 hours long.** God's creation "rest" was not limited to a 24-hour period, Taylor wrote, noting that Hebrews 4 underscores this point.

■ **The 'day' of Genesis 2:4 cannot be 24 hours long.** "After using 'the seventh day' in an analogical way... we read in the very next verse, Genesis 2:4: 'These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day [yon] that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.'

"The precise meaning of this is debated. But what seems clear, if we believe the Bible does not contradict itself,

is that this (singular) 'day' — in which the creation events (plural 'generations') occur — cannot refer to a single 24-hour period."

■ **Genesis 2:5-7 assumes that the "day" described in Genesis 2:4 was longer than an ordinary calendar day** because it included natural "seasons and rain cycles" that take longer than 24-hours.

Taylor argued that God does not want readers of Scripture to substitute the word "eons" or "ages" when they see the word "day," but neither does He want readers "to think of precise units of time, marked by 24 exact hours."

Ken Keathley, professor of theology at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., and coauthor of *40 Questions About Creation and Evolution* (Kregel), told BP he agrees with Taylor and is "convinced that the 24-hour interpretation does not do justice to all that the text says."

The old-earth interpretation of Genesis 1-2 is becoming increasingly popular among Southern Baptists, Keathley said in written comments. "Prior to the 1960s, the majority of evangelical pastors and professors (including those in the SBC) held to old-earth creationism. In 1961, John Whitcomb and Henry Morris published *The Genesis Flood* and the young-earth movement was born.

"Until recently, young-earth creationism has been the predominant view among evangelicals in general and Southern Baptists in particular. A significant change is happening now. The arguments in *The Genesis Flood* have not stood the test of time, and very few young-earth advocates use them."

"More and more pastors and leaders are realizing that the Genesis text does not lend itself easily to the young-earth position. Many of the strongest proponents of the old-earth interpretation are Old Testament scholars."

Young earth

James Hamilton, professor of biblical theology at Southern Seminary, disagrees with Taylor. In a Feb. 9 blog article responding to Taylor, Hamilton cited as a key passage in the debate Exodus 20:10-11, "But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work — you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates. For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy."

The "most natural reading of Exodus 20:10-11 seems to be that the six days of creation followed by the Sabbath day of rest was a cycle of the same kind of seven day week that was to become the pattern of Israel's experience," Hamilton wrote.

"It's hard for me to imagine someone coming to some other kind of conclusion unless he seeks to accommodate extra-biblical considerations from philosophy (a la Augustine) or science (a la contemporary old earthers)."

Outside influences?

Other respondents to Taylor also discussed whether his arguments were driven solely by study of the Bible or by outside influences as well.

Ken Ham, founder of Answers in Genesis (AiG), wrote in a blog post that Taylor's "real motivation is that outside influences have already led him to positulate whatever reasons he can try to muster not to be adamant about six literal days of creation in Genesis 1."

Ham added, "When Christian leaders today are rejecting a dogmatic stand on six, literal, 24-hour days of creation and a young earth, if you search their writings or question them, you will find that ultimately their thinking is being controlled by the belief in an old earth/universe (billions of years)."

"Even though some try to claim that is not so but that they are just looking at what the Bible says, if you ask the right questions, I assert, you will find this strong influence is there. You simply do not get the idea of millions or billions of years from Scripture — it comes from outside Scripture."

Evangelical blogger Samuel James, a Southern Baptist from Louisville, Ky., responded to Ham at the Patheos website, stating that Ham's blog was "an incredibly irresponsible reply to an article that deserved much better."

Hamilton similarly wrote that young-earth creationists should hold their position "with epistemological humility and not, as AiG does, suggest that old-earth creationists... are opening the door to abortion on demand and gay marriage."

James wrote in his blog, "If Ham believes that adherence to YEC [young-earth creationism] is essential for Gospel faith, he should produce the necessary theological arguments. Until he does, Ham has absolutely no right to slough off well written and fairly argued articles that present inerrancy-friendly challenges to YEC interpretations."

Ham's response is the kind of attitude that stifles productive discussion and unnecessarily divides the church. He should, and can, do better."

The longer I live the less perturbed I am by the actions and even attitudes of children. They're just children. They are not adults with mature thinking and values stuffed into a small frame. They're just kids, kids with limited life experiences and a worldview that starts within them and reaches about arm's length. They are just children, and taken as a total package, they're great little ole creatures. Just think about it. While we want to encourage them to grow up, mature, make good decisions and act right, there's a lot of good to be said about children, especially when you contrast them with adults. For instance, children will smile and laugh many more times a day than adults do. One study says that the average child will smile big and laugh up to 400 times a day while the average adult gets in that mode about a dozen times a day.

Adults will carry a grudge and nurse a hurt for decades while children tend to get over their misfits within minutes, at the most hours, and always within days. And it's wonderful to see children care about people and love them regardless of their social standing or their Grade Point Average at school or their celebrated giftedness or their color of skin or their age, young or old, while adults mature and thoughtful will almost instantaneously calibrate and calculate who people are and what they are by some flimsy measurement. It may not be accurate and at other times may be marked by fake standards. Kids are not perfect, especially when those kids are brothers and sisters.

The other day my wife and I were having a talk with one of our grandchildren. Now as many of you would clearly understand, our children are wonderful and our grandchildren are wonderful-er. At times, they are the wonderful-est. Our youngest daughter has our three youngest grandkids and each of them is everything that a grandchild is supposed to be - bright,



Kids Will Be Kids

beautiful, bubbling, and nearby perfect, especially when they are not all three together. There are two boys and one girl in the middle. And while they don't fight all the time and rarely fuss and fight with anyone other than themselves, their favorite time to get into an argument that becomes a fuss and a fight is at the end of the school day when they are picked up to go home. They are tired physically, emotionally, mentally, and are not aware of how drained they are from the day's activities, so when they get in the car, the older and the younger brother both begin to see if they can touch the right emotional button to set their sister off. They are both skilled at this exercise. She is skilled in combat, also, and begins to act and react both to defend herself and to attack the enemy.

Now the conversation we were having with our granddaughter was about these outbreaks of World War III and grandmother asks the granddaughter, "Why do y'all fight?" to which calmly and thoughtfully the granddaughter said, "It's what we do for a living."

We both laughed but in time realized there is some truth in that. They'd been separated all day, were tired, come back together and as children

have to reestablish the boundaries of life and landscape. Sometimes it gets out of hand and as many of you would understand, it wears and tears the emotions of a mom or a dad, but kids will be kids.

It's not unusual to see this same kind of activity in church, especially where the maturity level of the believers got stuck somewhere between Kindergarten and 3rd grade. They are rather short-sighted, easily disturbed, and totally committed to having their own way. The Apostle Paul, seemed to have a good understanding of the folks in the church at Corinth, that they were overpopulated with childlike. As you read the book of 1 and 2 Corinthians and as you come to understand Paul's ongoing relationship with the church, you begin to see flashes of reality about these leaders who had been childlike in their approach to life and how Paul dealt with them. For instance, do understand that these are the children of God but not yet perfect children. Sometimes we who know the Lord see someone come to know Him as Savior and are born into the family of God and two days later, we're imposing our lifelong understanding of Christian faith, our more mature

standards of walking with Christ, on other people.

While it has taken me a long time to get where I am in my walk with Christ, there are many days that I feel like I am still on Mile 1 and I often think that Jesus may think that I'm barely out of the starting blocks. But what I do know is that I do know Him and my life is different because of Him. I am grateful when sometimes someone else recognizes that it appears as though I have been with Jesus. Being a child of God does not mean that you are yet a perfect child of God.

The second thing that you can note about Paul dealing with these children in Corinth is that you can expect children to be children. Most of us have to learn and understand that you can expect lost people to act like lost people. You can also mark it down that children will act like children. They don't always mean to be mean, but sometimes when they disagree and fuss and fight, it's just what they do for a living. Then it is important for those of us who feel some sense of maturity that we not evaluate them and all they do by us and where we are. It's an interesting thing about spiritual development that some people never realize, and that is the sad ugliness of being childish in your actions can become the sad ugliness of arrogance as you become a mature know-it-all. Neither is where the Lord wants us ultimately to be.

A final thought that seems to be spread throughout Paul's dealings with the Corinthian children is his constant caring endeavor to encourage them toward maturity in Christ Jesus. Kids may be kids, but if we encourage one another, help one another, lift one another, instruct one another and above all, love one another, we all can grow and mature and bless one another.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

Submission Guidelines



The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. **Secondary method:** news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically

via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed.

Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newspaper are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

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XAYIT XYDQI, RAJF ITQYIWXAPK, RAJF

RQLIW, SGK RAJF SG TDGKYFK.

JSYV XADY: INFGIW

Clue: F = B

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke 6:44

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the

HOUSE TOPS.

Matthew 10:27 NAS

February 19, 2015

HouseTops is a Baptist Record supplement produced by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's Communication Services.

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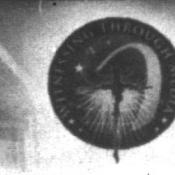
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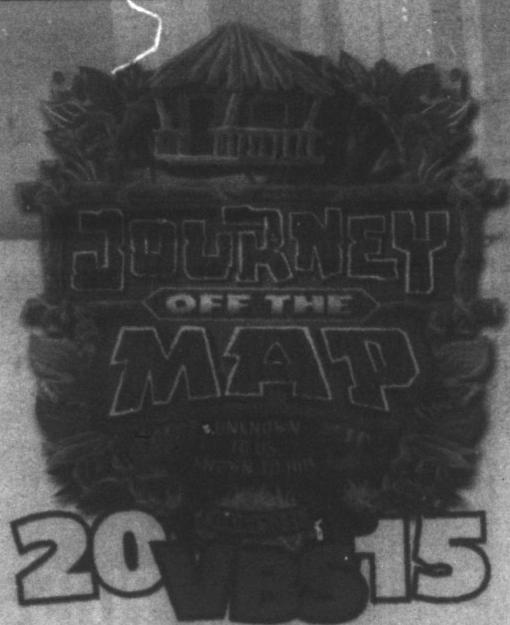
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OASIS 2015

Missions Leaders,

Looking for your next missions project? Well, we hope you will consider the OASIS 2015 Project. On October 22-26, 2015, a retreat for single career missionaries will take place in Malaysia. The purpose of the retreat is to provide opportunities for worship, fellowship, and encouragement. More than 85% of the single missionaries serving in this area of the world are women. Since our missionaries attend this retreat at their own expense, we want to say "thank you" to them for their service by sponsoring their participation in the retreat this year. The cost per person is \$900 and this includes all their expenses. All donors will be provided the name (or initials) of a missionary so you can pray for them during the retreat. The DEADLINE to participate is April 2, 2015. Because of the logistics of this event (plane tickets, etc. ...) an early deadline had to be set. Thank you for understanding!

We hope that you will prayerfully lead your group or church to help sponsor a missionary to attend this year's OASIS event. This is an opportunity for us to remind these singles that they have not been forgotten and that we are indeed holding the ropes for them. For more information contact Ken Rhodes, Director of Missions Mobilization for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, at krhodes@mbcb.org, or 800-748-1651, Ext. 398. Make checks payable to the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

Mail donations to:
Missions Mobilization
OASIS 2015
PO Box 530
Jackson MS 39205

Pray this day for...

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." James 5:16 (ESV)

Pray for: **Aaron & Tiffany Epps**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through general evangelism, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for: **Sheila Flowers**, missionary ministering to European Peoples through administration.

Pray for: **Robert & Margaret Fortenberry**, missionaries ministering to Sub-Saharan African Peoples through general evangelism, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for: **Earl & Ramona Hewitt**, missionaries ministering to Sub-Saharan African Peoples through medicine, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for: **Raymond & Cynthia Hodgins**, missionaries ministering to Deaf Peoples through sports evangelism, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for: **Jeffery & Liesa Holeman**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through strategy coordination.

Pray for: **David & Gloria Glaze**, missionaries ministering to Deaf Peoples through media promotion/consultation.

Pray for: **Janet Holloway**, missionary ministering to European Peoples through student evangelism.

Pray for: **Clarence Frank & Phoebe Harrison**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples.

Pray for: **Ronald & Beverly Holmes**, missionaries ministering to European Peoples through church planting, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for: **Thomas & Kerri Dewett**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through general evangelism, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for: **Alvin & Mary Doyle**, missionaries ministering to European Peoples through member care.

21

Pray for: **Thomas & Bonnie Hearon**, missionaries ministering to European Peoples through strategy coordination.

22

The IMB missionaries listed in the HouseTops prayer calendar are currently active in 2-4 year terms or in career service.

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House Tops

Couple out of business over religious convictions

GRESHAM, Ore. (BP) — An Oregon administrative law judge has ruled that Aaron and Melissa Klein, owners of a Gresham, Or., bakery named Sweet Cakes, unlawfully discriminated against a lesbian couple by declining on religious grounds the couple's request for a wedding cake.

In his Feb. 2 ruling, Judge Alan McCullough found that the Kleins violated an Oregon civil rights law that includes sexual orientation as a protected category. A March 10 hearing will determine how costly the fine will be for the Kleins, who closed their bakery after a public backlash and began making cakes at home.

The Kleins' case is among an increasing number involving wedding service providers who find their religious free exercise threatened by the expansion of legalized same sex marriage. Same sex marriage is now legal in 36 states, including Oregon, and the District of Columbia. Bakers, florists, photographers, and other professionals who provide products for weddings have at times been forced to provide professional services

for same sex ceremonies, despite their belief that marriage is only between a man and a woman.

It is not just providers of wedding services who are battling to express their religious convictions, however. Increasingly, those with biblical views regarding sexuality are finding their jobs and livelihoods threatened as government agencies — and potentially courts — rule that laws protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights trump the religious exercise of others.

Among the wedding service providers fighting in court to protect their freedom not to participate in same-sex ceremonies:

■ Barronelle Stutzman, a florist in Richland, Wa., is being sued in federal court by the state attorney general and the American Civil Liberties Union for declining to arrange flowers for a same-sex wedding. The case has been stayed until September for related proceedings in a lower court.

■ Jack Phillips, a Lakewood, Co., cake shop owner, has appealed a Colorado



SHUT DOWN — Melissa (left) and Aaron Klein of Gresham, Or., in happier times before a state administrative judge ruled that the pair were guilty of discriminating against a lesbian couple who wanted to order a wedding cake from their bakery, Sweet Cakes by Melissa, which is no longer in business. (Photo courtesy of sweetcakesweb.com)

Civil Rights Commission ruling against him for refusing to make a cake for a same-sex ceremony. The case is before the Colorado Court of Appeals.

Already, Jonathan and Elaine Huguenin, owners of a New Mexico photography

business, have lost in court. They denied a request to photograph a lesbian commitment ceremony. In April, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the New Mexico high court's decision against the Huguenins. The state court ruled the couple had violated

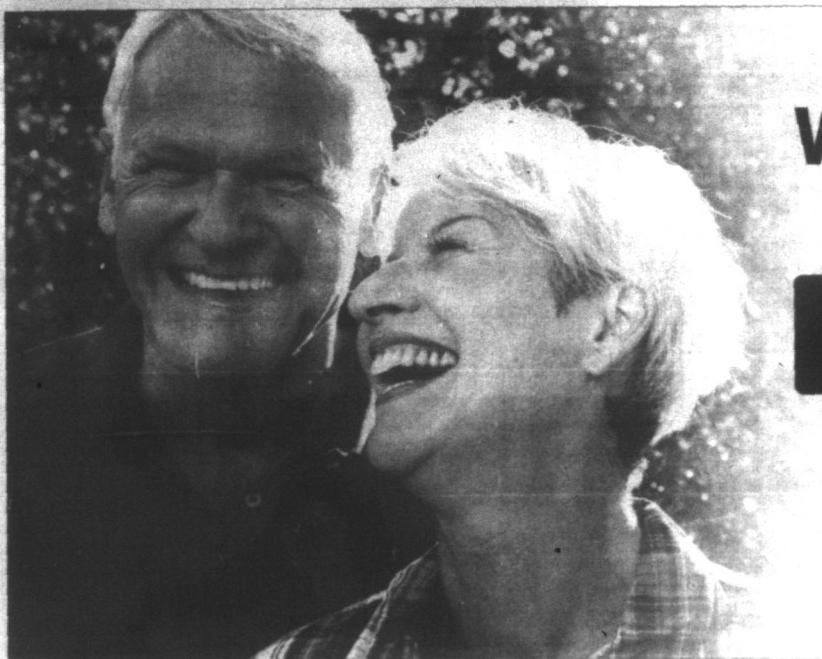
New Mexico's ban on sexual orientation discrimination.

Christians also are finding themselves vulnerable before state and local authorities. Among believers affected by state and local policies upholding LGBT rights:

■ Blaine Adamson, a Lexington, Ky.-area printer, is challenging an order by the county Human Rights Commission to print shirts that promote the Lexington Pride Festival.

■ Atlanta Fire Chief Kelvin Cochran was fired in early January after publishing a book in which he defended the biblical view of sexuality and described homosexual behavior as immoral.

Cities, and even smaller municipalities, increasingly are enacting ordinances expanding anti-discrimination protections to LGBT people in employment, housing, and public accommodations which include hotels, restaurants, and other businesses. Opponents contend the laws often infringe upon freedom of religion and conscience for individuals, churches, and businesses.



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PAKISTAN

cont. from p. 1

discrimination against religious minorities was behind the Punjab Prosecution Department's short list of 50 people who may have been victimized by those who filed the complaints - a common practice in Pakistan.

Christian rights activist Napolean Qayyum told Morning Star News it is "a common fact that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are used to settle personal scores and vendettas, and all people could be targeted with these laws. A large number of Muslims are languishing in jails on false charges, but so are Christians, so we urge the government to treat all such cases on parity."

"We are not opposed to the government's support to Muslims wrongly accused of blasphemy, but all citizens of the state should be treated equally and without any prejudice," said Sajid Ishaq, chairman of the Pakistan Interfaith League (PIL) and central president of the minorities wing of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, which rules Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Ishaq, who is vying for a senate seat reserved for minorities from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said the Punjab government should have considered cases involving Christians such as wife and mother Aasiya Bibi (commonly known as Asia Bibi) and others.

"We demand that the government also review cases [against Christians] so that our innocent people are not left to rot in jails for a crime they have not committed," Ishaq said.

A Punjab Prosecution Department official told Morning Star News on condition of anonymity, "We know that most of the cases registered under blasphemy laws are fabricated but unfortunately our police and justice system is weak and cannot withstand Islamists' pressure."

Article adapted from MorningStarNews.org, an independent news service focusing on the persecution of Christians worldwide. Used by permission.

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CP

cont. from p. 1

the call of Christ in sharing of their resources through difficult times. So many of our pastors have led out and our lay people have embraced that we need to stay faithful in giving through the Cooperative Program that the world might know the Lord Jesus. We have sought to be good stewards of not only the financial resources but the people resources to get the job done. We will continue to do so and thank God for the faithfulness of Mississippi Baptists."

From the birth of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to this present day the mission of Southern Baptists has been the Great Commission. For 170 years, Southern Baptists have sought to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people everywhere. The SBC was formed with a gospel vision. Its founding charter identifies

"We have sought to be good stewards of not only the financial resources but the people resources to get the job done. We will continue to do so and thank God for the faithfulness of Mississippi Baptists."



Jim Futral

Executive Director-Treasurer of the MBCB

its singular focus: ... for the purpose of eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination of Christians, for the propagation of the Gospel ...

"Another important factor not included in LifeWay's findings is the inclusion of younger pastors to leadership positions in the SBC," Blythe said. "An example of this would be the election of David Platt to the role as president of the International Mission Board."

MS POSITIONS

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, ELLISVILLE, MS IS CURRENTLY SEARCHING FOR A PERSON TO FILL THE ROLE OF KEYBOARD PLAYER ON THE WORSHIP LEADERSHIP TEAM. If you or someone you know is interested in this position, please contact the church office at 601-477-3256 or susan@firstbaptistchurch.com. Deadline for applying is Friday, February 27, 2015.

SHADY GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH, LUCEDALE, MS IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF YOUTH MINISTER: Please send resumes to: Youth Search Committee 14146 Highway 28 West, Lucedale, MS 39452 or email: shadygrovebaptis@bellsouth.net

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER NEEDED AT NEW SIGHT BAPTIST CHURCH: Please send resumes to: Youth Minister Search Committee 629 Forest Trail NE, Brookhaven, Ms. 39061

TOPEKA BAPTIST CHURCH IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL MINISTER OF YOUTH. Send resumes to: 807 China Grove Road, Jayess, MS 39641 or brodale54@bellsouth.net.

NORTH WINONA BAPTIST CHURCH IN WINONA, MS IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF MINISTER OF MUSIC. Please send resume to 602 Alberta Drive, Winona, MS 38967, or email to nwbcadmofice@att.net.

SPRING HILL BAPTIST CHURCH OF WATERFORD, MS. In search for a Husband and Wife to work with youth and children in the church. Contact by phone at 662-252-5131 (Leave Message if no answer) or Mail resume to PO Box 60, Waterford, MS 38685

BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH, A SMALL COUNTRY CHURCH BETWEEN DREW AND RULEVILLE, MISS. IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR till April 1, 2015. Please send resumes to P.O. Box 249, Drew, Miss. 38737.

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ties. You are giving to evangelism and the Christian Action Commission, you are giving to WMU and Men's Ministry and church planting. Giving through the CP affords us the opportunity of touching the greatest number of lives with the resources God gives us.

"For some reason, in our churches, we stopped talking about the CP and educating the people of the importance of the CP," Blythe continued. "Prayerfully consider accepting the 1% challenge. If every church in Mississippi would give 1% more than they did last year, it would result in an additional \$4 million to the CP. If every church in the SBC would increase their giving by 1% it would result in an additional \$100 million to the CP. The Kingdom impact would be enormous. Someone has well said, 'The sun never sets on the Southern Baptist missionary enterprise and that is due in large part to the Cooperative Program.'"

Revivals & Homecomings

► **Enon Church, Batesville:** Revival, Feb. 22 - 25; Sun., 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; James Messer, speaker.

► **Immanuel Church, Cleveland:** 60th anniversary, Feb. 22; service, 11 a.m.; Jim Futral, speaker.

Need a light?

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)

2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Commit Your Way to the Lord • Nehemiah 10:28-39

Introduction

Spiritually, a confession looks back and looks ahead. One admits wrongdoing (past) in order to repent (future).

Chapter ten records the appropriate conclusion to a public confession by the Jews in Judah (9:5-37). According to the last verse in chapter nine, they made a "firm covenant" (ESV) or "binding agreement" (NIV, HCSB); the Hebrew noun derives from a verb that means "to be firm."

Commentary: Nehemiah 10:28-29

Commitment requires focus, a single-mindedness or wholeheartedness. To marry, for example, the groom leaves his parents to cleave to his bride (Gen. 2:24). "To walk in God's law," the Jews in Judah "separated themselves from the peoples of the land" (NASB; see also 9:2; 13:1-3). Two participants depict their resolve: "joining with their kinsmen, their nobles" and "taking on themselves a curse and an oath" (NASB).

The law consists of "commandments," "ordinances," and "statutes." These nouns, along with "testimonies" or "judgments," occur often as synonyms in the Old Testament (see Dt. 30:16; 1 Kg. 2:3; Ps. 19:7-11). They, being plural, indicate the breadth of God's written standard. "Through the law God shows his interest in all aspects of man's life which is to be lived under his direction and care" (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament).

Commentary: Nehemiah 10:30-39

The "firm covenant," just ten verses, applies an assortment of laws. It divides into four unequal parts. The first three resolutions address personal behavior: marrying only a Jew (v. 30), keeping the Sabbath (v. 31a; see also Jer. 17:19-27), and observing the sabbatical year (v. 31b). The last resolution (a set of oaths) addresses the Temple, both its operation and its personnel (vv. 32-39; see also 12:44-47).

1. Aftermath

Chapter ten names eighty-seven signers of the covenant (vv. 1-27). Nehemiah tops that list. As governor, he led the return to God.

Good leadership, however, cannot coerce good behavior to last (see Nehemiah resorting to force in 13:7-8, 10-11, 15-21, 23-28). As proof, Hezekiah (2 Kg. 18:1-4; 2 Chr. 29-31) and Josiah (2 Kg. 22:3-23:25; 2 Chr. 34:1-35:19) were righteous rulers whose sweeping religious reforms did not live them. Their own sons were wicked kings: Manasseh (2 Kg. 21:1-18; 2 Chr. 33:1-20), Jehoahaz (2 Kg. 23:31-33; 2 Chr. 36:1-4), Jehoiakim (2 Kg. 23:36-24:5; 2 Chr. 36:5-8; Jer. 26:20-23; 36:1-

32), and Zedekiah (2 Kg. 24:18-25:7; 2 Chr. 36:11-13). Every follower is a sinner with a will.

Nehemiah served as governor for twelve years (5:14) and, just like his political tenure, the spiritual renewal in Judah ended. Revivals always do. Consider three recent examples: First Great Awakening (1730s and 1740s), Second Great Awakening (early 1800s), and Welsh Revival (1904-1905).

Chapter thirteen details how the Jews in Judah broke their promises to marry only a Jew (vv. 23-30), to keep the Sabbath (vv. 15-22), and to care for the Temple (vv. 4-14, 31). The breach of contract happened when Nehemiah had gone

degree and second degree murder. Intent affects the sentencing, but it cannot prevent a guilty verdict. Murdering someone (action) matters more to judge and jury.

Jeremiah, as a divine spokesman, declared, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds" (17:10, NASB; see also Gen. 6:5-7). Intentions, specifically bad ones, rouse God. Improper motives taint good deeds (Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18) and disqualify prayers (Jas. 4:3).

Good intentions, on the other hand, do not impress God. Good behavior does (Jas. 1:22-25). Hence, John the Baptist, another divine spokesman, urged, "Produce fruit consistent with repentance" (Lk. 3:8, HCSB).

3. Application: Talk is cheap.

Chapter thirteen is a sad postscript. It exposes chapters nine and ten to be nothing but the minutes of a lengthy meeting; lots of words that a big crowd eventually ignored. Contemporary Christian artist Rob Frazier penned the lyrics, "You can say you do. You can pray you do. You can swear it's true, but, until you prove by your caring ways, then the words you say are just words; nothing but words, empty words" ("Love is Sacrifice").

Parke is professor, Department of Christian Studies and Philosophy, Mississippi College, and a member of Morrison Heights Church, Clinton.

Ready When Pornography Controls • 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

"The Tragic Consequences of the Sexual Revolution" is the headline for the February edition of "Decision Magazine". Contributor Jerry Pierce states: "...in 1967, spurred on by a gradual cultural slide, the budding sexual revolution had a coming-out party—infused with sex, LSD and rock 'n' roll-in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. That "Summer of Love" inaugurated an effort to cast off traditional morals for a new vision of freedom, love and enlightenment. It succeeded wildly—and failed miserably."¹ Today, almost fifty years later, our society is truly reaping the consequences. Since 1973 some 55 million babies have died from legal abortion, marriage has been devalued, and sex trafficking has become an international business—just to name a few. Additionally, pornography once purchased from behind store counters is now available with a simple click on the computer. Twenty-five years ago would there have been a Sunday School lesson on this subject? Indeed we have come a long way baby!

Scripture tells us there is nothing new under the sun. When the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians regarding the issue of sexual immorality things were worse than they are today. A study of the Greek religions during this time period will give you a view of the moral atmosphere. Yet, just as that culture called Christians to lower their

standards, the same call is being echoed today. Therefore, as we conclude this quarter let us hold firm to the truth of God's Word. His commands and precepts are given for our good.

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality." (1 Thes. 3:3 ESV). God's will for your life is revealed in all of God's Word. To better understand this passage we need to have a firm grasp on the meaning of two words.

The first is the word 'abstain'. In the New Testament it is used only 7 times: see the book of Acts, 1 Timothy, 1 Peter and

then in 1 Thessalonians (1:3; 5:22). The word is a command from God and it means an absolute prohibition, "to hold off from, to distance oneself from, and to have nothing to do with. Second, the phrase 'sexual immorality' comes from the Greek word porneia, which is a very broad word encompassing every kind of sexual activity outside the circle of God's will. It covers sins of the mind, body, eyes, ears and lips. It includes premarital sex, extra-marital sex, and

every form of pornography. In fact the English word for "pornography" comes from the Greek word porneia. Paul is telling us that Christians must abstain from a pornographic lifestyle in the broadest sense of that word.²

Practice self-control is the instruction found in verses four and five...that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God." The word sanctification (vss.

3, 4, and 7) literally refers to a state of being set apart from sin to holiness. In this context it means being set

apart from sexual impurity in particular, holding oneself away from immorality.³ The phrase 'his own vessel' is a reference to a person's own body. "A God-empowered man controls his own body. When God is not in control, the body controls the man," writes Ray Pritchard. This is what is meant when Paul writes, "not in lustful passion." Knowing God is what makes a difference in our life (transformation) and He equips us to be able to practice self-control.

A strong reminder, "...and that no man transgress and defraud his brother," we are not to take advantage of others. Other words for defraud are "wrong" or "cheat." Immorality is like that. It always cheats someone else—usually someone you love very much.² Closing this lesson Paul gives us three facts to remember: "God will punish those who practice immorality" (6b). God has called us to purity (vs. 7). Rejecting purity means rejecting God (vs. 8).² When we reject God we are treating God's commands with utter contempt.

No one is exempt from temptation. Avoid places which are questionable, add a computer filter, place controls on cell phones and television, and choose friends wisely. Guard your mind and heart through prayer and God's Word. Remember "God gives His Holy Spirit to you" and there is no temptation which can overcome you (1 Cor. 10:13).

¹ Decision Magazine, February 2015, "The High Cost of 'Free Love'" by Jerry Pierce

² Ray Pritchard, The Sermon, "Abstain!" www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/abstain/

³ John MacArthur Study Bible Study Notes

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.



Explore the Bible
with Ivan Parke

back to Susa (vv. 6-7).

2. Application: Intentions are NOT actions.

In the movie "Facing the Giants," Coach Grant Taylor informed one of his players, "Matt, you can't judge your father by his actions and then yourself by your intentions." Intentions matter, but actions matter more.

For a defendant in a murder trial, motive is the difference between first



Bible Studies for Life
with Laura Leathers



Just for the Record



STUDENTS FROM FIRST CHURCH, EUPORA, participated in the recent Webster County Disciple Now weekend at the church.



The children's department of SILVER CREEK CHURCH, MCCOMB, made over 80 valentines to send to the Veteran's Hospital patients.



The youth of BETHEL CHURCH, POPLARVILLE, led in the morning services in Sunday School and worship Jan. 25.



The youth of NEWHEBRON CHURCH, NEWHEBRON, enjoyed Xtreme Winter Conference in Gatlinburg, Tenn. Shown are the participants with youth minister Jordan Parker.

In other Church News:

► Shady Grove Church, Lucedale, is hosting a Wild Game Supper Mar. 5, 6 p.m. Bring a wild game covered dish for the cook off. Paul Ott, guest speaker.

College News



The table tennis team of MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE is the Dixie Division Table Tennis winner. Led by three star players from China, Cheng Li, Yichi Zhang, and Tong Zhang, the team went undefeated during the Feb. 7 tournament. Shown are president Lee Royce with the team players in Alumni Gym.



(Below) The 2015-2016 Student Government Association at the WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY Hattiesburg campus took office in an installation ceremony held on February 2. The SGA serves as the elected liaison between the student body and the university administration. Pictured following the installation ceremony are (front row, left to right) Sawyer Walters of Hattiesburg, representative; Krestian White of Collins, commissioner of public relations; Andrew Coleman of Pascagoula, president; Mary Hannah Lott of Hattiesburg, vice president; McKayla Streckbeck of Seminary, chief justice; (second row, left to right) Sean Laird of Gulfport, commissioner of entertainment; John Taylor Wesley of Columbia, treasurer and chief of staff; Lindsay Knight of Hattiesburg, secretary; Josiah Lawrence of Columbia, commissioner of elections; Zakary Ferand of Perkinston, justice; and Gabriel May of Columbia, representative. Not pictured is Chamapuwa Tinago of Harare, Zimbabwe, representative.

Staff Changes



MAIN STREET CHURCH, MENDENHALL, has called Mark Jackson as pastor. He is shown with his wife Robin and children, Kaity and Whitten.

In other Staff Changes:

► Okahola Church, Purvis, has called Gary Kelly as pastor. He comes with his wife, Linda. His first service was Feb. 15.



NEWHEBRON CHURCH, NEWHEBRON, has called Mike Grenn as pastor (shown at left with his wife, Wanda); and Jordan Parker (above) as youth minister.